



AUROMEDIA



RAINBOW BUTTERFLY

an educational interaction and magical experience



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Sri Aurobindo Society

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MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE



As we enter Mangalapuram.....

Background

It was an unplanned trip. I went to the village Mangalapuram to understand the work of an NGO, READ (Rights, Education and Development) with the Arundhatiyar community in Sathyamangalm region located in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. Arundhatiyars are one of the most backward communities of Tamil Nadu; they are untouchables amongst the untouchables. I was helping READ to design a handwritten community wall post for a federation of women 'Self Help Groups' in 71 villages in Sathyamangalam. And thought it would be good to visit an Arundhatiyar village and therefore, landed in Mangalapuram.

Mangalapuram was like many villages in India. Most of its population constituted of landless labourers. People rear goats and cows for additional income and diet. Arundhatiyars also work as leather tanners, shoe-makers and manual scavengers. They are traditionally those who beat drums when someone dies.



I met an Arundhatiyar woman while walking to a bridge school run for Arundhatiyar children in another village. It was evening and she was on her way home after a daylong work in the fields.

While travelling around before I went to Mangalapuram, I sighted a group of Arundhatiyar men in inebriated state kicking off the burning logs of a pyre. Alcoholism is one of the major problems faced by the community. Tobacco substance abuse exists rampantly among both men and women.

Arundhatiyars live in colonies separated from the upper caste settlements in the village. Many of them particularly women haven't gone out of the precincts of their village; their life being largely confined to the fields they labour at and home.





Most of the Arundhatiyar children are first generation school goers; parents are illiterate and have just started to understand the importance of sending children to school.

There are many communities around India like Arundhatiyars; their children being first generation school goers with fewer opportunities for adequate growth and development within the community due to economic deprivation and centuries old suppression.

READ runs a child activity centre in Mangalapuram; the objective of this centre is to provide quality educational support which the children cannot get at home. The centre also provides psycho-social care and life skill training to children.



A group of children, seen studying as we entered the Child Activity Centre run in the open community space.



While with children at the Child Activity Centre.....

While with the children at Mangalapuram, I got the opportunity to understand their community. Since I had to interact with them, I thought of doing so playfully.

I was surrounded by around 20-30 children across all age groups. Inquisitive adults also stood around watching us as it was an open classroom. There was a black board standing on one side and I asked the teacher if I could do an activity with children. My accomplice from READ readily agreed to act as translator between me and the children.

I drew many lotuses on the board and asked the children, "What is this?"

The children easily identified it as a lotus lake. However as we continued, they showed no imaginative inclination and ended the story abruptly. They said, "We saw the lake, sat on its bank for some time, plucked few lotuses and went back home. At home we ate food and went to sleep."





I immediately realised, it's not going to be the same as with urban kids. These children are born to parents who live to earn for food and daily survival only and this was reflected in the thinking process of the children.

I thus told them, "No, you did not go back home. While you were sitting on the bank of the lake, a big elephant came there."

And from here on, the story took a different direction. Whenever I felt the imagination of the kids was not forging ahead, I introduced an element to stimulate their imagination. I introduced the 'Rainbow Butterfly' later in the story to take the process forward. You will have to read the story to know the beautiful direction it gave to the narrative.

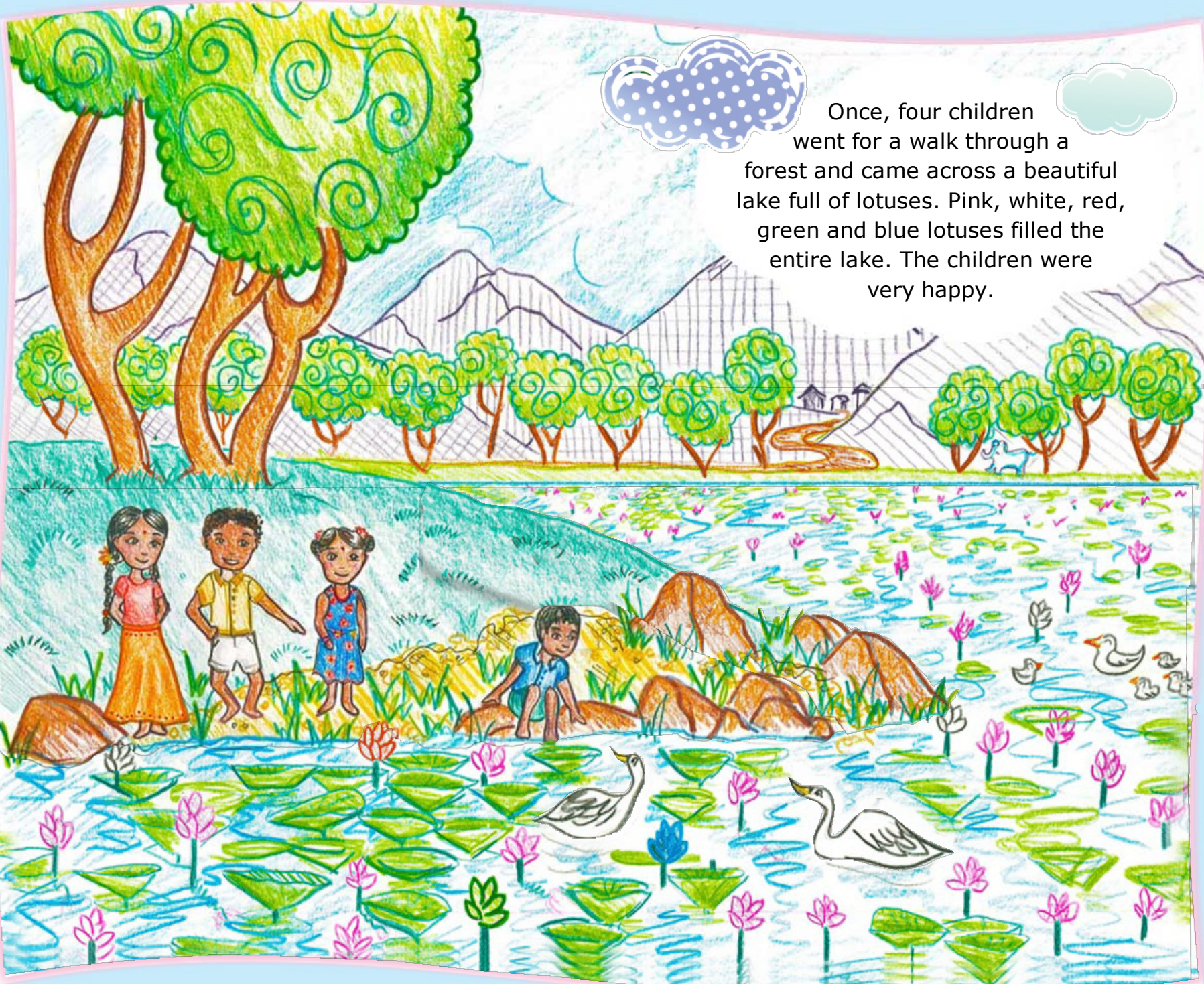


While we were weaving the story and whenever an imaginative element was added to the unfolding narrative, I could see children getting transported to their 'wonderland' so much so that their eyes shone with a different glitter in the setting sun.

I had to make sure that teachers don't interfere in the way children think. Like once when with closed eyes, children started to imagine the lotuses in their lake, one child said, "I see green lotus in my lake." The teacher standing nearby, immediately shouted back at him saying, "Oh, no, no there's no green lotus." At that point I had to support the children, while politely asking the teachers to just stand witness to what children are thinking.

Venus Upadhayaya

Here's how the story goes about....



Once, four children
went for a walk through a
forest and came across a beautiful
lake full of lotuses. Pink, white, red,
green and blue lotuses filled the
entire lake. The children were
very happy.

Just then, a big white elephant came in stomping his big feet.

The children got really scared as they watched him come closer. The elephant told them not to be afraid of him.





The elephant became very good friends with the children and told them to sit on his back, promising to take them to a special place.



The elephant took the children to Wonderland, a dreamlike place. Wonderland was colourful and jolly. The best part about it was that the tiny insects spoke! The flowery-caterpillar asked the children, "How did you come here?" The children replied, "Our friend, the white elephant brought us here."



Just then, the curly-ant
went inside the
elephant's trunk.
Helplessly, the poor
elephant
started sneezing.

"Aaaaacchhhuuu", sneezed
the elephant loudly.
With one loud sneeze, curly-ani
came out. Except, it was now
a beautiful Rainbow
Butterfly.



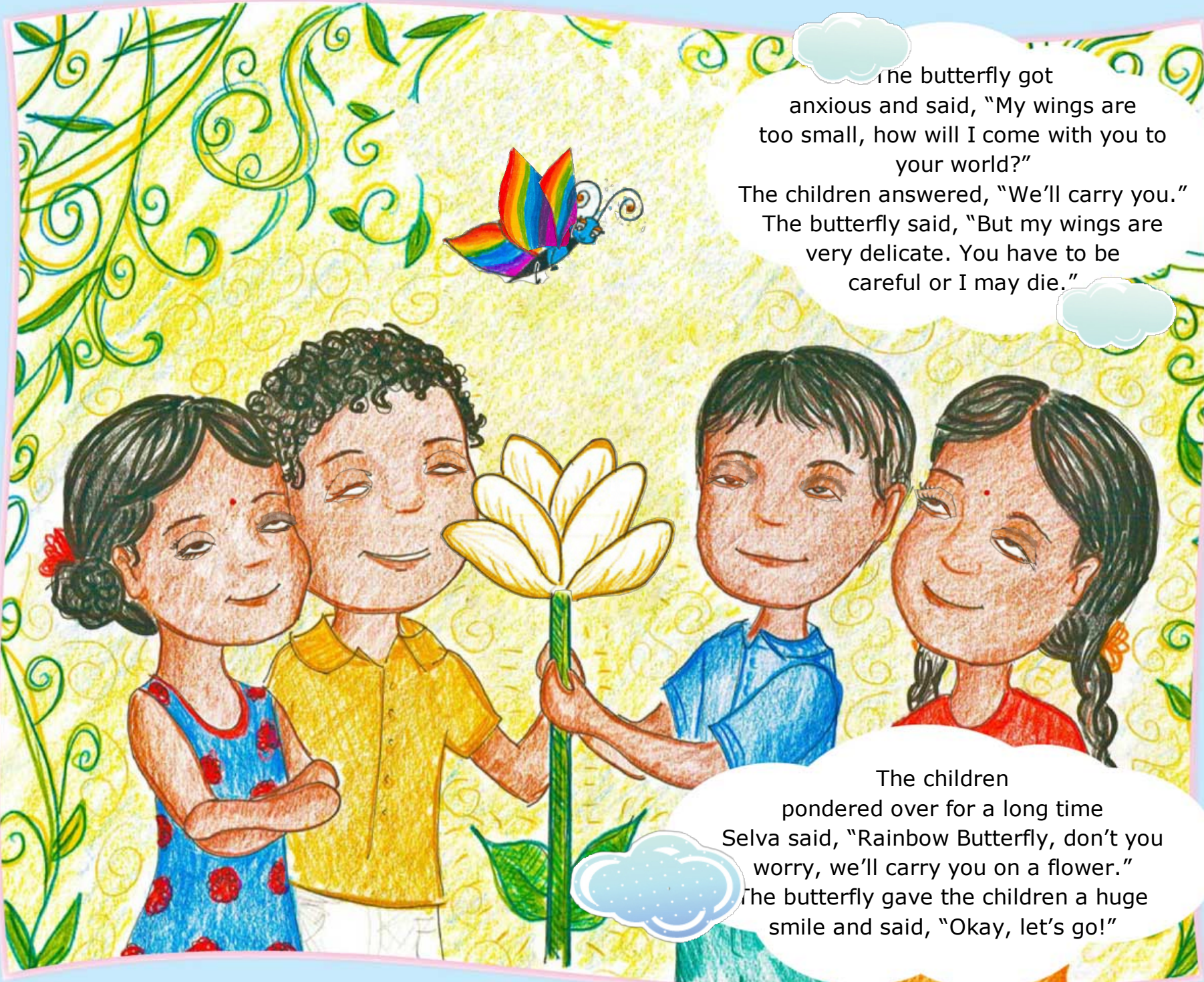


The bright
butterfly asked the children, "Friends,
which world have you all come from?"
The children said, "We have come from Earth."
The butterfly said, "Aha! I have heard stories that
the Earth is beautiful. Please tell me what is
there on Earth?"

The children
excitedly replied, "Trees, flowers,
birds, lakes, mountains, animals,
forests, rivers and the Sun."
The butterfly asked, "Can you take
me to your world?"

The children happily agreed.
The butterfly asked, "How far away
is it?"

The children answered, "It's
very, very far away!"

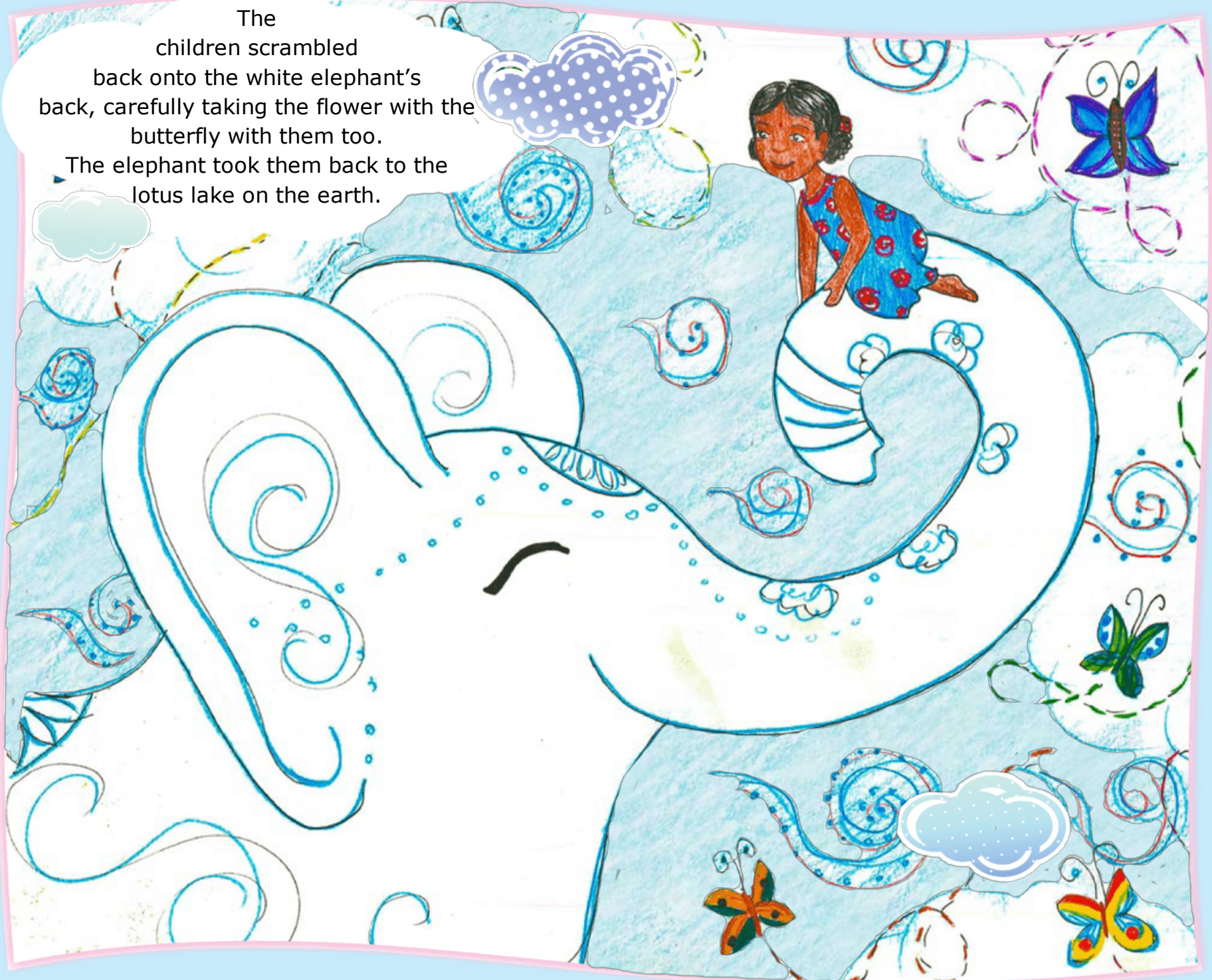


The butterfly got
anxious and said, "My wings are
too small, how will I come with you to
your world?"

The children answered, "We'll carry you."
The butterfly said, "But my wings are
very delicate. You have to be
careful or I may die."

The children
pondered over for a long time
Selva said, "Rainbow Butterfly, don't you
worry, we'll carry you on a flower."
The butterfly gave the children a huge
smile and said, "Okay, let's go!"

The
children scrambled
back onto the white elephant's
back, carefully taking the flower with the
butterfly with them too.
The elephant took them back to the
lotus lake on the earth.



The children merrily got back to their world, waiting to show the butterfly the adventures they have in their village and the forest.





Learning

Working with a group of mixed age group of children – The teacher should not always keep encouraging only the expressive children. In a mixed age group of children some tend to dominate the rest, a good teacher is conscious of the spoken, unspoken mind of every child in the group and is able to adequately reach out and communicate with every child in the group.

A teacher should be patient, kind towards children and not be judgemental in accessing the capacities of children in the group. While a teacher might need to politely and gently ask the dominating children to be patient, she has to very softly and smilingly encourage those who want to say something or have latent thoughts and underlying emotions wanting to be expressed.

A teacher has to be aware that children might not always think in standard terms. There's no need to deliberately teach children to behave like adults. It's best to leave an impact by an example and teach children not standard behaviours but core values that would help them to cultivate good thoughts and human values and kinship.





Things to specifically keep in mind while working with children in a rural set-up – A teacher should not harbour unrealistic expectations from the children influenced by modern education popularised by the mass media and understand that a child learns best from the context. While a teacher might find it very important to make the child finish his homework and learn everything in his academic syllabus, a child might also have talents and interests that only a teacher can understand and encourage. To encourage a creative child, the only way is not to send him/her to another class, but to forge a relationship with a child in such a way that a child is able to self-pursue his interest with the teacher's motivation and support. Later when the attitude and the interest of the child matures enough after exploring his interest in his own environment, a child should be encouraged for deeper learning in his field of interest.





CREDITS

- ✧ Story evolved with Venus Upadhyaya by the children of the Child Activity Centre in Mangalapuram run by Read, Sathyamangalam, Tamil Nadu
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